

Lawyers' Row Block
Five structures on east side of N. Court House Road,
between 14th and 15th streets
Arlington
Arlington County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1277

HABS
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6-

PHOTOGRAPHS AND
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LAWYERS' ROW BLOCK

HABS No. VA-1277

- Location: 1403-37 N. Court House Road, east side of the road between 14th and 15th streets, Arlington County, Virginia
- Use: Demolished June 1990; site occupied by a county jail.
- Significance: The five buildings that composed Lawyers' Row in Arlington represent a statewide tradition of county seat architecture and planning. In Virginia's early history, the court-house area of a county was a cultural and political hub where businessmen, lawyers, and merchants converged. The modest Lawyers' Row was unusual as one of the state's only twentieth-century groupings, and here mingled an intimate community of prominent life-long Arlington jurists.

PART I. HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

The first county courthouse of independent Alexandria County—later the "cityless" Arlington County—was built in 1898 on Block 8 of the subdivision being developed by the Fort Myer Heights Land Company, the site once occupied by Fort Woodbury, where the 1960 courthouse sits today. The Victorian red-brick mass atop the hill, designed by A. Goenner, was dominated by an easily visible 75-foot clock tower. Some "wooden, unimpressive, small buildings" were erected across what was then Sherman Avenue by the early twentieth century, though the setting was still bucolic in ways.¹ South of the courthouse area, along the path of Washington Boulevard (Route 50), wound Rocky Run and the Washington, Alexandria, & Falls Church electric railway; the Court House Station stood at the foot of Sherman Avenue.²

At the time, this government center was on the southwest edge of the Fort Myer Heights neighborhood, a sparse locale with neighbors limited to Clarendon, Aurora Heights, Colonial Heights, and the Fort Myer army base. Around the courthouse, a trio of commemorative markers helped consecrate the vicinity as the county hub: a World War I memorial tree and plaque installed in 1923, the Mother's Tree and plaque in 1924, and the striking eagle-and-cannonball of 1931 to remember lives lost in both world wars.³ A 1925 street map shows four structures along Sherman Avenue where Lawyers' Row would emerge. At the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century, the commercial makeup of the county of more than 17,000 persons was led by groceries/general stores, auto garages/service stations, lawyer/doctor professionals, and realtors. Until recently, Arlington had been one of the

¹ "The Way They Were," Thomas W. Phillips interviewed by Edward D. Campbell for the Arlington History Program (May 1985), 158.

² Gregor Noetzel, "Alexandria County, Virginia" (Washington, D.C., 1907). Between 1900-10, seventy new subdivisions were established in Arlington; Fort Myer Heights was one of the earliest.

³ "Court House" Geographical Files.

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major Virginia producers of brick.⁴ Attorney Lawrence Douglas has attested to the homey character of the area. There were no eateries, so the lawyers sometimes dropped in for lunch on the jailer and his wife who lived across the street above the jail; noontime baseball games on the courthouse lawn also broke up the day, he recalled.⁵

It was not until the 1930s that the block of Sherman Avenue between 14th and 15th streets filled out with the construction of modest offices 10 feet to 24 feet wide, set end to end; affiliated buildings included a dwelling, garage, and probably outhouses. The legal profession dominated tenancy, among them some of the fifty or so "prominent" attorneys in Arlington.⁶ Besides the individuals discussed in context with these structures, in the late 1920s Sherman Avenue was also the address of attorneys James Bleakly; Reid, Gordon & Naylor; and Claude O. and Harry R. Thomas.⁷ The Thomas' rented for a time an office at the southwest corner of 14th Street and Sherman Avenue that was built by another prominent lawyer, Crandal Mackey.⁸ Across the street, the first of two relatively plain, fireproof wings was added to the south side of the courthouse in 1929-36 to house records. In 1934-35, when streets were renamed countywide, Sherman Avenue became North Court House Road.

Proximity to the courthouse and the unassuming one- and two-story visage of Lawyers' Row facades helped sustain an intimacy among the many attorneys, judges, and clerks of court, while it offered a sense of accessibility to clients who might be intimidated by the legal process. Thomas Phillips recalled just how crude the early structures were: lacking bathroom facilities except for the courthouse itself, outhouses were located behind the offices, and in the winter, each morning began by chopping wood to fuel a fire in the tin stove that heated each building.⁹ A legacy of interrelated professionals affiliated with these offices helped shape the early political history of Arlington--among them the familiar names Ball, Rucker, Lyon, Jesse, and Moncure. "Many of Washington's finest and oldest families can be noted on the windows of the low, "colonial-type office buildings on Courthouse Square," wrote Cecil

⁴ Arlington County Virginia Directory and Year Book, 1924 (Rosslyn: Colonial Printery, 1924), 12, 14. The population continued to climb dramatically, in 1940 to 57,000, and in 1950 to 135,000; for many years Arlington was the fastest-growing county in the nation.

⁵ Arlington Historical Society Newsletter 21 (May 1977).

⁶ Thomas Harry Randolph, "My Life" (typed mss in Arlington Families File, n.d.), 8-9; Phillips, 211. These include Frank Lyon, Capt. Crandal Mackey, R. C. L. and Judge Robinson Moncure, Louis Machen, and Frank L. Ball. The lists of individuals are identical.

⁷ Carol Hooper, "The Nature of Things: The Courthouse Row Buildings of Arlington County, Virginia," typed manuscript, no date; Polk's Washington Suburban Directory of Maryland and Virginia Towns Adjacent to the District of Columbia, 1927-28 (R.L. Polk & Co. Publishers, 1927), 633, 636-37. Approximately eight buildings are estimated to have occupied the block by 1936.

⁸ Phillips, 163, 206; Randolph, 8-9. Claude specialized in real estate law, and Harry was a trial judge for the early trial justice court and served as clerk of court around 1900.

⁹ Phillips, 163.

Crittendon in 1946, "That one spot where the atmosphere of old Arlington endures."¹⁰

That small-town ambience was provided in part by the quaintly sentimental Colonial Revival architecture that was popular nationwide--and well represented by the form and features of the more "designed" Lawyers' Row structures: the Ball Building, ca. 1936-41; Jesse Building, ca. 1927; Moncure (Adams, Porter, and Radigan) Building, 1936; and Rucker Building, 1936. Of these, only the Jesse Building was Spanish influenced. The Colonial Revival is a far-reaching family of arguably "American" designs that evolved after the mid-nineteenth century, which include log cabin, pueblo, Georgian, and Federal sources, or features thereof. The same sentiment inspired the preservation of Colonial Williamsburg (1929), and more locally the construction of the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway (1928-32). A collective patriotic memory asserted that objects and images fondly associated with American forefathers such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson sustain the historical fantasy, the "thrill of vitality," assigned to early American life.¹¹

Town halls built in the early twentieth century were typically Federal or Georgian revivals. A 1912 Architecture article asserted that these "should be the accepted type of design for public or semi-public buildings in our small American towns, especially the East, where colonial traditions still survive with some strength."¹² Such were the Lawyers' Row offices, subserviently arranged around a courthouse, so common in Virginia. Genuinely colonial courthouse complexes are extant at Gloucester, Gloucester County; Charlotte Court House, Charlotte County; Palmyra, Fluvanna County; and Charlottesville, Albemarle County. For the next two decades, Arlington's Lawyers' Row was in transition. There were fewer but more substantial masonry buildings than their predecessors, and they were expanding via additions to rear facades. An existing one-story office (No. 120) where Jessie and McCarthy operated was demolished to make way for the Ball Building (No. 1432-37), which filled the width of its lot. The Jesse Building doubled in size from a 24-foot square to a rectangle. Rear additions, all made predominantly during and after World War II, reflect a new fondness for practical matters and materials rather than antique forms. This is especially apparent in window treatments where double-hung wood sash is coupled with steel-frame casements and glass block. The collective interiors boast little ornament. The Moncure Building, formerly a one-room-deep block, was stretched as far as the rear lot line through piecemeal one- and two-story additions between 1945 and 1953. The Rucker Building was also extended well into the lot behind it, ca. 1951. Nos. 1449 and 1441-45, a pair of one-story offices north of the Ball Building, were razed after 1954; a one-story building at No. 1431 was unchanged

¹⁰ Cited in Hooper. Cecil Crittendon, Arlington: A New Frontier (New York, 1946), 104; C. B. Rose, Arlington County, Virginia (Arlington Historical Society, 1976), 172, 174. In 1911, Frank Lyon, R. C. L. Moncure, and George Rucker represented two-thirds of the petition to study Arlington's south border dispute; the committee formed included Rucker for the Arlington District, and Moncure, Lyon, architect Frank Upman and Crandal Mackey (who preceded Frank Ball as Commonwealths Attorney in 1904-15) for the Washington District. Two years later, Moncure and Charles Jesse were on the committee that drafted a charter for the would-be city of Arlington.

¹¹ Cited in William B. Rhoads, "The Colonial Revival and American Nationalism," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 35 (December 1976), 239.

¹² Rhoads, 244.

until demolition sometime after the mid 1950s.¹³

County growth after the war prompted the need for additional county space. A three-story wing was erected north of the courthouse in 1948. Both it and the south block, which are extant, are superficially Colonial Revival in details such as the rusticated first-story facade, brick quoins at the corners, contrasting horizontal banding, and scroll-topped pilasters framing the windows. The jail then occupied the third floor. Revival styling in general was on the wane, but the greatest departure from historic precedent came in 1959 with the erection of the southern courthouse tower, introducing with it a thoroughly stripped-down modernism. Within two years, the original 1898 courthouse in between was demolished and a modern one replaced it.

The anti-European sentiment shrouding both World Wars sustained an unabated favor for the Colonial Revival until at least the 1940s when modern technologies began to eschew historicism. It was copied literally, as in near-replications of Mount Vernon, for instance, or in spirit, through an architectural vocabulary of gable roofs covered with slate, brick (usually red), white wood trim, and porches. Emblematic of adobe and Spanish revivals--like the Jesse Building--are plain round-arched windows, a simple and light facade, and rounded roof tiles.

The Jesse Building (No. 1423-27), was the oldest of the four most important offices, built in 1927 for Charles T. Jesse (1879-1960), a lawyer who by then had been elected three times to the Virginia General Assembly. He practiced as a principal in a series of firms and served as Arlington County Treasurer from 1932-39. Jesse was first elected a delegate to the General Assembly in 1920, and subsequently in 1924 and 1926. In 1927-28 Jesse and McCarthy is advertised at "Arlington Court House," where the office was staffed by Walter McCarthy (1898-1985), a judge, lawyer, and "notary"; C. Norinne Kloss, a stenographer; and clerks Henry Klings and Frank K. Woolfolk.¹⁴ But Jesse's most significant contribution to the county may have been as an advocate for the county-manager form of government in the 1930s.¹⁵

Architect Frank Upman (1872-1948), then a partner in Upman and Adams, designed the Jesse Building. Upman also designed Washington's Congress Hotel and Woodward Building, where he had an office at No. 1003. The Woodward (1909) is considered "the most exuberant example of a handful of Spanish Colonial apartments built in D.C." Circumstances are unclear, but there was some sort of relationship between the county and the Upman-and-

¹³ Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1936, 1954-60.

¹⁴ Polks's, 634, 638.

¹⁵ Robert Nelson Anderson, "Arlington Adopts the County Manager Form of Government," Arlington History Magazine 1 (October 1958), 53.

Percy C. Adams collaborative, which survived from 1917 until Upman's death in 1948.¹⁶ In 1916, for instance--when Upman lived in Arlington's Livingstone Heights--proposals for a new Cherrydale school and auditorium were to be delivered to his District office; and by 1930, Adams is credited with designing "practically all the schools in Arlington, Virginia."¹⁷ Upman probably also worked on at least the south courthouse wing addition.¹⁸ Upman and Adams' simple design for the Jesse Building features twin front entrances with round-arched openings. The main roof and the one projecting over the central bay is covered with tile supplied by a Chicago-based firm; identification was made by its imprint, "1924 LUDOWICI CELADON CO."¹⁹ The only specific ornament was a pair of cast-concrete medallions with a floral motif, and the cast band between the floors where the metal signage letters are anchored. The Jesse Building was the first Lawyers' Row structure to feature indoor bathrooms.²⁰

A related Spanish Colonial presence in Arlington is found in the small, stucco cottages built by Brumback Realty in Lyon Village, developed by Frank Lyon (1867-1953) in 1923. Lyon, a lawyer, also helped develop Clarendon, where the Lee Block and a former filling station exemplify commercial variations on the style.²¹ An Interstate Commerce Commission examiner in 1907-12, he traveled extensively throughout the United States. The Spanish mission churches of the Southwest are believed to have inspired him to build Lyonhurst/Missionhurst, ca. 1907-11, his home until 1923.²² Lyon was one of the original property owners of undeveloped Lawyers' Row land.

¹⁶ Henry and Elsie Withey, Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased) (Los Angeles: New Age Publications, 1956), 613; James Goode, Best Addresses (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 114; Arlington County Monitor (20 October 1916). "Frank Upman," AIA membership application, 1919; Frederick Tilp, Alexandria, to Eleanor Lee Templeman, Arlington, 26 December, 1974. Upman began practicing in Washington in 1902 where he worked for Henry Ives Cobb. As a principal of Harding & Upman he designed several structures in the city; he was a member of the Washington Chapter-American Institute of Architects (1919) and the Allied Architects' Association of Washington. Architect Frederick Tilp worked for Upman & Adams on several projects, including an addition to the courthouse, many schools, and Frank Lyon's "apartments."

¹⁷ John Clagett Proctor, ed., Washington - Past and Present, vol. 4 (NY: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1930), 404-05; The Monitor (26 May 1916). Adams arrived in D.C. in 1909 and practiced as Averill and Adams until 1914. He worked alone from 1914 until 1917, when he joined Frank Upman to specialize in schools and fine residences.

¹⁸ Frederick Tilp letter.

¹⁹ "Ludowici Roofing Tiles: Tile Roofs for Georgian and Colonial Architecture [brochure]" (Chicago: Ludowici-Celadon Co., 1936; "Imperial Spanish Tiles [advertisement]," Journal of the American Institute of Architects (March 1924), xvi.

²⁰ Phillips, 163.

²¹ Historic Affairs and Landmark Review Board, Historic Resources in the Clarendon Commercial District (Arlington County, May 1985). The Lee Block, at Washington and Irving streets, was built in 1925. The former filling station, 3200 Wilson Boulevard, was erected in the 1930s by contractor A. J. Porter, who also built the Rucker Building in Clarendon. Both are one-story brick structures with tile-covered roofs.

²² AnnMarie Fisher, "Lyon Village," typed mss (16 December 1987). Frank Lyon built the roads in Lyon Village, Charles E. Smith named the streets.

The three other noteworthy structures, each built about 1936, reflect an indigenous colonial Virginia spirit. This is especially true of the Moncure Building and next to it the Rucker Building. Similar in scale, proportion, and attention to detail, the overall composition of these two structures was endearing. The important horizontality was preserved by the one-and-one-half-story height, symmetrical facades, and shallow roofs with dormers. The Rucker Building was further distinguished by parapet gable-end walls, brick quoining at the corners, and mousetooth brickwork along the cornice. The central doorways of both mimic Federal sidelights and above-transom glazing.

The architect of the Rucker Building, Kenton Hamaker (1909-82), commenced working in Arlington in the early 1930s with an office in the Rees Building, also built by George Rucker. Prior to World War II, Hamaker designed his own home (1938) and others on Ohio Street between Little Falls Road and Williamsburg Boulevard; in 1946 he became a principal in Sharpe and Hamaker, general contractors, and until the 1970s he continued to design churches, houses, office buildings, and furniture.²³ By the time Hamaker completed 1415 N. Court House Road, his work was considered "both artistic and modern, and yet extremely practical."²⁴

In contrast to its neighbors, nothing is known of who designed 1437 Courthouse Road, ca. 1935-41. The Ball Building was stylistically somewhat awkward compared to the others, which were better crafted and proportioned. Described as "one of the brightest and most popular of the young attorneys practicing law at the Alexandria County bar in 1915," Frank L. Ball, Sr. (1885-1966), was the first president of the Arlington Bar Association, and he served as Commonwealth's Attorney for Arlington, Alexandria, Fairfax, and Prince William counties from 1916-24. After that, he and John C. McCarthy opened a private practice at 120 Sherman Avenue along with Lawrence Douglas. That building was one-story high, 12 feet wide, built of tile with a frame addition on the rear. Denman Rucker (1911-87), himself Commonwealth's Attorney in 1948-52, worked at the firm in 1937-38.²⁵ From 1924-32 Ball served as a state senator; in 1927 he first proposed the incorporation of Arlington and the manager system (though it would not be legislated until three years later).²⁶ In the 1930s he then returned to Arlington to work and build 1437 N. Court House Road.

The least significant of the Lawyers' Row structures at the time of demolition was the Jesse-Hosmer Building, built and owned by Charles T. Jesse, probably ca. 1934-40. The concrete-

²³ "Kenton D. Hamaker" obituary, Washington Post (ca. 18 May 1982); Jacqueline Antone, "House That Kent Built," Northern Virginia Sun (18 June 1959); AIA membership files; "Hamaker Drawings," Virginia Room. The Virginia Room contains an incomplete collection of Hamaker's drawings, which are indexed; no documentation exists for projects prior to the 1950s.

²⁴ "Architect's Work Wins Reputation," The Arlington Courier (28 January 1937).

²⁵ "Frank Ball's Competency," Alexandria County Monitor (29 May 1915); Polk's, 630; "Denman Rucker" obituary, Northern Virginia Sun (5 May 1987). E. Wade Ball, his brother, was Treasurer in 1908-32, before which he was Deputy Treasurer for seven years.

²⁶ Anderson, 52.

block, one-story office had a two-room addition on the rear. Lacking any styling whatsoever, the structure might exemplify the quality of the first generation of structures to line this block; only in alignment and scale does it fit in with its neighbors. Attorney and Circuit Court Judge Emory Hosmer, the occupant for many years, began practicing law in Arlington in 1923. The 1927-28 directory lists Hosmer as living at 108 Sherman Avenue, which would have been the renumbered offices at Nos. 1415 or 1419, or the dwelling at 1415-1/2. Hosmer's career included posts as Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney, Commissioner in Chancery, and Circuit Court judge.²⁷ Lawyer M. Patton Echols also occupied the building at one time; his son (1925-64+) was an attorney and engineer who practiced law here from 1958.²⁸

Most of these structures were occupied until a few months prior to demolition. The Lawyers' Row site in the southwest corner of its block, was Site B of four potential locations considered for the new county jail. Though the Jesse, Ball, and Rucker buildings were listed among the county's "Inventory of Historic Resources and District," they were never described as historic or otherwise significant in the 1989 planning document, "Courthouse Site Selection Analysis," issued by the county manager. The county's assertion that "to be part of local history, the seat of the local government needs to be recognized by residents and the general population," apparently excluded bonafide historic sites, for preservation in situ and adaptive reuse of Lawyers' Row was never part of any option in the jail-site study. The fate of the five buildings--threatened with demolition or disassembly and storage--was quickly decided on the basis of economics, when the county projected \$100,000 apiece to save the facades.²⁹ All five were demolished between late spring and early summer 1990.

See also:

Rucker Building (HABS No. VA-1274), 1403 N. Court House Road;
Moncure Building (Adams, Porter, and Radigan Building, HABS No. VA-1275),
1415 N. Court House Road;
Jesse-Hosmer Building (HABS No. VA-1276), 1419 N. Court House Road;
Jesse Building (HABS No. VA-1273), 1423-27 N. Court House Road;
Ball Building (HABS No. VA-1272), 1437 N. Court House Road.

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²⁷ Cited in Hooper; Polk's, 633; Richard Lee Morton, Virginia Lives: The Old Dominion Who's Who (Hopkinsville, KY: Historical Record Association, 1964), 293. Some confusion arises because a 1927-28 directory lists his residence at 108 Sherman Avenue; this may have been the original structure on the site. Echols Jr. (1925-64+), was an attorney and engineer who practiced law starting in 1958, and he lived at 1815 N. 14th Street.

²⁸ Morton, 293.

²⁹ County Board of Arlington, "Courthouse Site Selection Analysis," Report by Anton Gardner, County Manager (16 June 1989), 16, 20; "Arlington County Inventory of Historic Resources and Districts" (6 February 1990).

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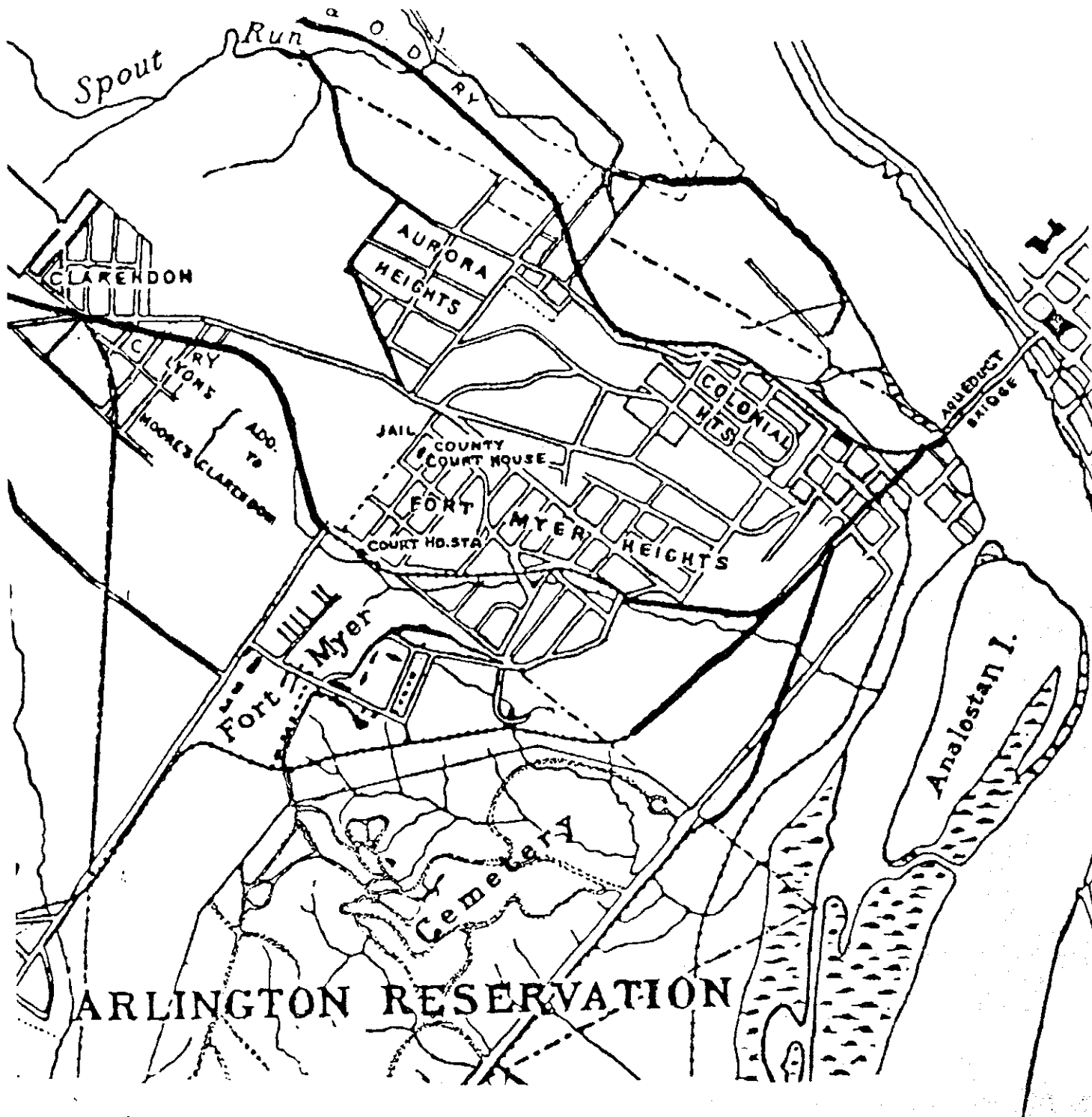
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Maps

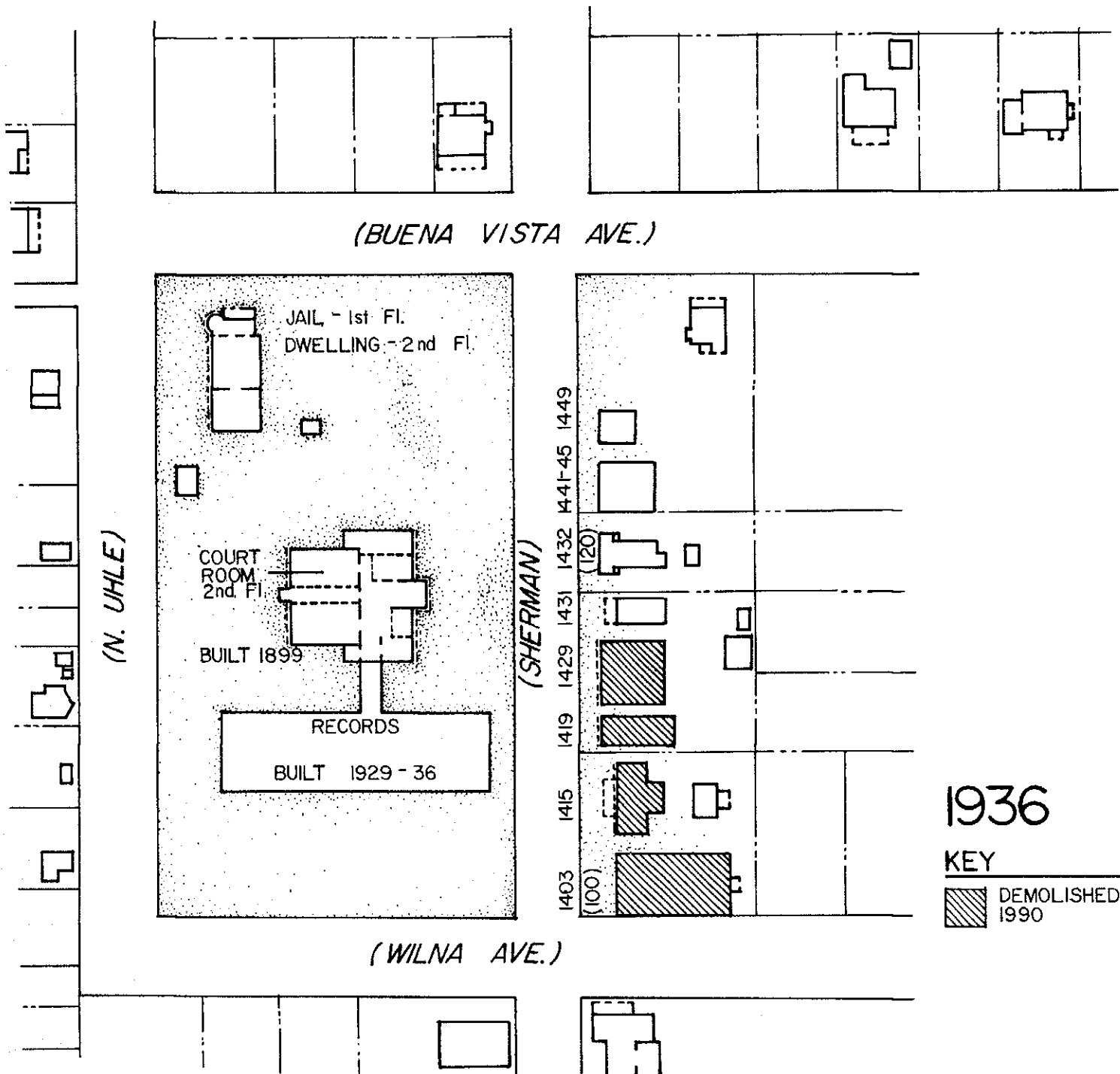
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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

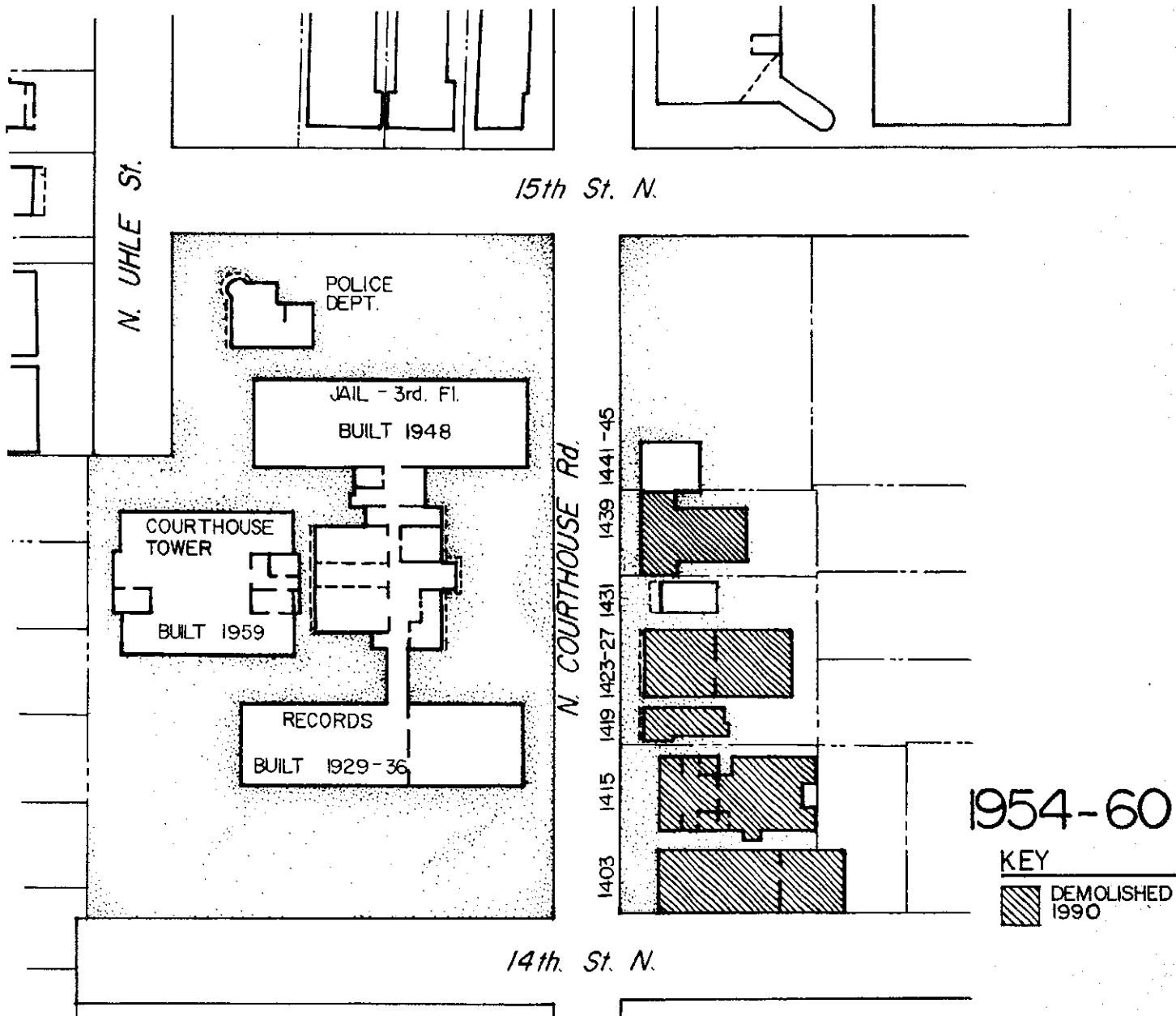
This documentation project was coordinated by the Arlington Heritage Alliance Inc. with the sponsorship of the Bell Atlantic Charitable Foundation, to mitigate the impending loss of these historic Arlington County buildings. Sara Amy Leach directed the project; Estella Bryans-Munson was project historian, and John Schwartz was the large-format photographer. All documentation is available, without copyright restriction, from the HABS Collection, Prints and Photographs Division at the Library of Congress, and the Virginia Room, Arlington County Library.



Detail, Map of Alexandria County, Virginia, 1907. Virginia Room, Arlington County Library.



Site plan of Blocks 8 and 9, between 14th and 15th Streets in 1936; At the earlier date, eight Lawyers' Row buildings sit across from the 1898 courthouse with wing. Drawn by Thomas Behrens, HABS, based on Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps.



Site plan of Blocks 8 and 9, between 14th and 15th Streets in the late 1950s; the later years reveal seven enlarged buildings opposite a much-enlarged courthouse complex. Drawn by Thomas Behrens, HABS, based on Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps.

ADDENDUM TO:
LAWYERS' ROW BLOCK
North Court House Road between Fourteenth & Fifteenth Streets
Arlington
Virginia

HABS VA-1277
VA, 7-ARL, 6-

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